part four

a game

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RATES

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the SANDMAN™

SUGGESTED FOR MATURE READERS

THE LAND.

THEY'VE TOLD ME THAT THIS IS THE MOST RISKY PART OF THE JOURNEY.

RISKY. NOT DANGEROUS. RISKY.

THERE'S NO COVER ON THE PLAIN. IF THE BLACKGUARD SPOT US, THAT'S IT. NOWHERE TO GO. NOWHERE TO RUN.

IF WE MAKE IT ACROSS THE PLAIN THERE'S A FOREST. "IT'S NOT A SAFE PLACE," SAID WILKINSON. "NOT BY A LONG SHOT. BUT THERE'S PLENTY OF COVER, AND THERE'S NO LOVE LOST BETWEEN THE TREES AND THE CUCKOO.

"NOT THAT THEY'RE ON OUR SIDE, MIND YOU, ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE TREES ARE ALL RIGHT. KEEP THEMSELVES TO THEMSELVES, UNLESS THEY'RE BOTHERED, AND ONLY AN IDIOT BOTHERS A TREE."

THAT'S WHAT HE SAID.

THEY TELL ME THERE ARE BAD THINGS IN THE FOREST. I'VE BEEN TOLD TO PRAY WE DON'T MEET ANY TWEENERS. WHATEVER *THEY* ARE...

BUT IT'LL BE WARMER THERE. AND IF WE'RE LUCKY, THERE'LL BE FOOD.

I HAVEN'T EATEN SINCE I GOT TO THE LAND, LATE LAST NIGHT. WE'RE DRINKING MELTED SNOW. I'M STARVING.

I'M WEARING A PRETTY PARTY DRESS-- THE KIND I ALWAYS IMAGINED PRINCESSES WOULD WEAR, WHEN I WAS LITTLE.

I'M COLD.

I'M SO COLD.

Quiet, Wilkinson. You want to tell everyone we're here?
I was singing quietly. To keep our spirits up.
The wind'll carry voices away.
Wilkinson.
Okay, okay. No singing.

4: BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT

Written by Neil Gaiman, drawn by Shawn McManus, lettered by Todd Klein, colored by Daniel Vozzo. Edited by Zach's Mom, Karen Berger, assisted by Alisa Kwitney.

Sandman features characters created by Neil Gaiman, Sam Kieth, and Mike Dringenberg.

COME ON. LET'S CHECK IT OUT.

SO, WILKINSON. WHAT'S ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FOREST?

Once past the forest we're in trouble again.

There's people living there, really down all the way to the sea.

WHAT *KIND* OF PEOPLE?

Just normal people. Like me, or you, or Luz here.

Or me.

Or Prinado.

They used to be subjects of the Heiromancer. But...

I... *REMEMBER* THE HIEROMANCER. I MET HIM, WHEN I WAS HERE BEFORE. HE WAS A *SWEET* OLD GUY. KIND OF LIKE MY GRANDFATHER. WHAT *HAPPENED* TO HIM?

He's dead. I expect that he's dead. If he's *lucky* he's dead.

Then we come to the Citadel of the Cuckoo.

Maybe we can avoid it. Maybe. But it stands between us and the Brightly Shining Sea.

If we get to the sea, there's a causeway that leads to the Isle of Thorns. *That's* where you've got to get to. With the Porpentine.

'Cos *that's* where the Hierogram is. Or so Martin Tenbones maintaines.

I hope *you'll* know what to do when we get that far because none of *us* have a clue~~

SHH. LOOK!

Oh no...

OH, HOW GHASTLY. THE POOR THING.

Murphy protect us~~ it's the Cantoblin. I knew he was dead. I felt him die.

'E was carrying a message for us.

'E still 'as it. Look.

'ere it is. Do you want to read it now? It may be important.

I REMEMBER HIM.

"MARTIN TENBONES AND I WERE ON OUR WAY TO THE ARCH OF THE PORPENTINE, WHEN WE WERE ATTACKED BY THESE WHITE GRUB THINGS, LIKE FAT CHILDREN.

"SOME PEOPLE HELPED US ESCAPE--THEY WERE CARRYING THIS **ROOM** AROUND WITH THEM."

"I MEAN, IT WASN'T A **BIG** ROOM, OR ANYTHING. BUT WE WENT INTO IT, AND WHEN WE CAME **OUT**, WE WERE SOMEWHERE **ELSE**. SOMEWHERE CLOSER TO WHERE WE **WANTED** TO BE.

"AND THIS **GUY** WAS WAITING FOR US, AND HE MADE US BREAKFAST. I **LIKED** HIM."

Aye, that was the Tartoblin right enough.

Then, when the Cuckoo crushed the rest of the Room Patrol, he became a courier...

...taking tidings of the resistance to different parts of the Land.

WE HAVE TO **BURY** HIM.

But the ground is harder than ice, and we only have our paws...

THEN WE'LL COVER HIM WITH **SNOW**. MAKE A **CAIRN**.

Leave it out, gal. There's more snow on its way. And every second that passes, the Cuckoo's forces come closer to findin' us--

NO. WE **BURY** HIM.

I OWE HIM THAT MUCH.

Yes, Princess.

Right. What are we waiting for? Let's bury the poor bugger.

I ONLY MET YOU ONCE, BUT YOU FED ME, AND YOU WERE GOOD TO ME, AND YOU DIED IN MY SERVICE, TANTOBLIN.

Murphy's peace be with you.

BE AT PEACE.

OKAY, LET'S GO.

Look! Shelter! Let's get under there, until the worst of it's over.

I SUPPOSE THE SNOW WOULD HAVE BURIED THE TANTOBLIN ANYWAY...

PRINADO-- LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT THE SCROLL YOU TOOK FROM HIM. IT MAY BE IMPORTANT.

'Ere it is, Princess.

Princess? Is that a picture of you?

YES. I'VE BEEN DOING A LOT OF FACE-PAINTING RECENTLY. ORIGINALLY I WAS GOING TO GET A TATTOO. BUT I DON'T WANT ANYTHING *PERMANENT* ANYMORE.

IT'S LIKE I CAN BE A DIFFERENT PERSON EVERY DAY.

WHERE DID HE GET THE PHOTOS FROM?

THIS IS *WEIRD*. MAYBE THE SCROLL EXPLAINS WHAT THE PHOTOS ARE ABOUT...

"THE EUROPEAN CUCKOO (CUCULUS CANORUS) WINTERS IN THE..." HUHN? WHAT THE HELL *IS* THIS?

Read it, my Princess. The Tantoblin thought it was important. He gave his life bringing it to us.

"THE EUROPEAN CUCKOO (CUCULUS CANORUS) WINTERS IN THE TROPICS, AND IS AN ABUNDANT SUMMER VISITOR TO CONTINENTAL EUROPE AND BRITAIN, ARRIVING IN EARLY APRIL.

"IT TAKES ITS NAME FROM ITS DISTINCTIVE SONG. THE CUCKOO DOES NOT ITSELF BUILD NESTS; INSTEAD IT PLACES ITS EGGS IN THE NESTS OF OTHER BIRDS.

"THE SPECIES MOST VICTIMIZED TEND TO BE THE TREE-PIPIT, PIED WAGTAIL, HEDGE SPARROW, REDBREAST AND REED-WARBLER.

"INDEED, A BIRD WILL BROOD THE FOSTER-CHICK WHILST HER OWN INFANTS LIE SLOWLY DYING OUTSIDE THE NEST.

"THOUGH SMALL BIRDS INSTINCTIVELY MOB THE CUCKOO, WHEN AN EGG IS IN THE NEST AND AFTER THE ABNORMAL FLEDGLING IS HATCHED, NO ATTEMPT IS MADE TO DISLODGE IT.

"FOR WHEN HATCHED THE YOUNG CUCKOO, DURING THE FIRST FEW DAYS OF ITS NAKED, BLIND AND APPARENTLY HELPLESS EXISTENCE, THROWS OUT THE UNHATCHED EGGS OR FELLOW NESTLINGS.

"AFTER A WHILE THE MURDEROUS INSTINCT PASSES AND ANY NESTLINGS THAT ARE TOO HEAVY TO HAVE BEEN THROWN OUT ARE ACCEPTED AS BED-MATES. AS A RULE THE YOUNG CUCKOO GETS THE NEST TO ITSELF.

"APPARENTLY THE VOICE OF THE YOUNG CUCKOO HAS A COMMANDING, ALMOST HYPNOTIC POWER..."

Shh. Quiet.

Danger.

WE SAT THERE IN SCARED SILENCE AS THEY MARCHED PAST US, ONE BY ONE, THEIR BOOTS TRAMPING QUIETLY ON THE FRESH SNOW.

THEY CAME SO CLOSE.

I COULD HAVE REACHED OUT AND TOUCHED ONE. I COULD HAVE REACHED OUT, BUT I DID NOT.

BLACK GLISTENING ARMOR. I HAD NO DOUBTS THEY WERE SEARCHING FOR US, AND HAD A BRIEF, MAD IMPULSE TO SCREAM, TO RUN OUT, TO LAUGH, TO SAY, "HERE WE ARE!"

HIDE AND SEEK...

BUT I SAT THERE LISTENING TO MY BREATHING, LISTENING TO MY HEART THUMPING IN MY CHEST, POUNDING LIKE A DRUM IN ONE OF THOSE CRAPPY LATE-NIGHT JUNGLE MOVIES.

I COULD HEAR IT. AND I KNEW *THEY* WOULD TOO.

JESUS CHRIST, I COULD HAVE *TOUCHED* THEM. ALL THEY HAD TO *DO* WAS BEND DOWN AND THEY'D'VE *SEEN* US.

THIRTY OF THEM. I COUNTED. WHEN THE LAST ONE HAD MARCHED PAST OUR SHELTER, WE WAITED IN SILENCE.

NOTHING ELSE STIRRED.

SOON THE SNOW DIED DOWN, AND AN EARLY TWILIGHT FELL, AND WE RECOMMENCED OUR JOURNEY.

NOTHING ELSE BAD HAPPENED CROSSING THE PLAIN; ALTHOUGH WHEN I TRIED LOOKING AT THEM AGAIN I SAW THAT THE POLAROIDS HAD CHANGED INTO OLD PLAYING CARDS, WHILE THE WORDS ON THE SCROLL HAD RUN TOGETHER, AND WERE BLURRED AND UNREADABLE.

THAT NIGHT WE SLEPT IN A DITCH, THE FOUR OF US HUDDLED TOGETHER FOR WARMTH.

I DO NOT REMEMBER DREAMING.

THE DREAMING.

"Which of the Skerries?"

"WELL, *THIS* ONE, LORD. IT'S HERE ON THE MAP. *LOOK*. YOU SEE?"

"I see. And you are certain this is the same one?"

"I'M CERTAIN, LORD. I FOUND IT IN THE ARCHIVES. THERE CAN BE ***NO*** MISTAKE. I HAVE THE COMPACT HERE FOR YOUR INSPECTION."

Let me see it.

Hmmm.

It comes back to me now, Lucien. But it was a very long time ago. I had thought the Skerry long-since crumbled; the compact forgotten and void.

I was in error. Ah well. We must wait and see how things fall.

UH. EXCUSE ME, SIR. YOU MAY NOT REMEMBER ME. MY NAME'S NUALA. I WAS A FAERIE GIFT.

NUALA.

YES. *RIGHT*. WELL. I WAS TOLD TO WATCH THE DREAMS OF THE MORTAL WOMAN. ***BARBIE***. AND NOT *DO* ANYTHING.

WELL. I...

I *DID* SOMETHING. WHEN SHE FIRST STARTED TO DREAM. I SORT OF TRIED TO ***WARN*** HER. THAT THERE WAS BAD STUFF GOING DOWN. I COULDN'T JUST STAND BY AND NOT *DO* ANYTHING...

I THOUGHT I SHOULD *TELL* YOU. I'M *SORRY*.

I see.

Thank you for telling me, Nuala.

That will be all.

Nuala? You did the right thing.

You're smilin' this morning. That's not something I expected to see in a hurry.

MMM? OH. HI, WILKINSON. I'M WARM. I CAN'T BELIEVE IT. I THOUGHT I WAS NEVER GOING TO BE WARM AGAIN. WHERE ARE WE?

The forest borders. You hungry?

OOH. I WISH YOU HADN'T ASKED. YES, I'M STARVING.

Well, Prinado's up trees lookin' for eggs, and Luz is barterin' with the Gniedrig for fire.

Here, take my hat. Only pick the white mushrooms with the pink gills.

OKAY.

Close call last night. There but for the grace of Murphy went we. Hacked into messy little chunks.

I wasn't scared, of course. Not me. Nerves and whiskers of steel I've got.

SURE YOU HAVE.

I saw the first of 'em, this boot goin' past, black as midnight's arsehole, I thought, you're just lucky, mate.

If I wasn't lookin' after the young lady, you'd be for it.

WILKINSON?

Yes?

WHAT'S THE HIEROGRAM?

It's um. Well, it's um. It's sort of more like an um. Well...

YOU DON'T KNOW?

Martin Ten-bones did.

I suppose we'll just have to burn that bridge when we come to it.

YEAH. I WISH I KNEW WHAT I WAS GOING TO HAVE TO DO.

"Wish in one hand, shit in the other, see which fills up first."

Old Wilkinson family saying.

Which reminds me. There's a stream just down there. Do your necessaries, and wash up afterwards. The others 'll be back soon.

Then we'll have breakfast.

THAT WAS WONDERFUL. REALLY, GUYS. THAT WAS AN INCREDIBLE BREAKFAST. I DON'T THINK I'VE EVER HAD A BETTER MEAL...

BUT...

BUT HOW COME I COULD TASTE IT? I DIDN'T THINK YOU COULD TASTE THINGS IN DREAMS.

This isn't a dream.

It is a dream.

Well, yes, it is a dream.

But not in the way she means.

Is still a dream.

Before you came, before the cuckoo, the Land was 'ere.

HUH? BUT IF IT'S MY DREAM...

No. You come 'ere to dream. But the Land is older than you, Princess.

HOW--HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Well, just look around you. Did you create all this?

I DON'T KNOW. DIDN'T I?

No. Course you didn't. You're just the Princess.

ANYWAY--ALL I'M SAYING IS I'M REALLY HAPPY. I CAN'T REMEMBER EVER BEING SO HAPPY BEFORE.

NOT WHEN I WAS FIRST DATING KEN.

NOT EVEN WHEN I WAS A LITTLE BITTY KID, HAVING PICNICS WITH MY TOYS. I'M JUST...

...HAPPY.

I loved bein' a kid. I was one of seventeen children.

We were all named Wilkinson--- I suppose it was roughest on the girls, but we all got used to it in the end.

I blame the parents, really.

I WAS AN ONLY CHILD.

I would've liked to've bin an only child. That way when someone shouts Wilkinson, you know if it's you or not.

Mustn't grumble. Our parents were the salt of the earth.

Lovely people. It was just when they found a name they liked, they stuck with it.

I...MY CHILDHOOD WAS... FINE, I SUPPOSE. I MEAN, MY MOM AND POP WERE NICE PEOPLE, GOOD PEOPLE.

IT JUST WASN'T VERY EXCITING.

Someone's watching us.

They've bin watchin' us since we entered the forest.

But if it was the Cuckoo's people, they'd've nobbled us by now.

So what should we do now?

WE KEEP GOING. WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?

WE WALKED THROUGH THE FOREST FOR DAYS. ALL THE TIME I FOUND MYSELF IMAGINING EYES UPON ME, PEERING FROM BEHIND TREES.

DARKNESS. THE SMELL OF LEAVES AND TWIGS. SMALL RUSTLINGS. THE FOREST IS NOT A COMFORTING PLACE FOR TRAVELLERS.

BUT WE WERE WARM, AND WE HAD JUST ABOUT ENOUGH TO EAT. SOMETIMES THAT'S ALL THAT'S IMPORTANT.

AFTER A WHILE I SIMPLY ACCEPTED THAT WE WERE BEING FOLLOWED AND OBSERVED, JUST AS I GOT USED TO A DIET OF APPLES AND NUTS, AND DRINKING FROM SMALL STREAMS AND BROOKS, AND USING MOSS FOR TOILET PAPER.

I FELT LIKE BILBO IN MIRKWOOD, IN THAT BIT WHERE THE GIANT SPIDERS GET THEM.

WILKINSON? ARE THERE--ARE THERE GIANT SPIDERS AROUND HERE?

Giant Spiders? Round here? Course not.

SORRY. SILLY OF ME.

Nah. The Giant Spiders is all in a little forest to the west of here.

They are good people. They are loyal to you, not to the Cuckoo. But they are few in number, and timid beasts.

OH.

THAT'S NICE.

AS WE GOT FURTHER INTO THE FOREST THE TREES BECAME SO THICK WE LOST THE SUN COMPLETELY. THE LIGHT THAT DID FILTER THROUGH THE LEAVES WAS STAINED GREEN AND GOLD BY DAY, COOL MOONLIGHT-BLUE BY NIGHT.

WILKINSON CLAIMED, WHEN I SPOKE TO HIM, TO HAVE AN INSTINCT FOR DIRECTION.

ACTUALLY HE TOOK HIS LEAD FROM PRINADO, WHO, FROM TIME TO TIME, WOULD CLIMB EASILY INTO THE HIGH BRANCHES, AND SCOUT THE WAY AHEAD.

AND THEN, ONE DAY, PRINADO DIDN'T COME BACK.

But what do we do? Without Prinado we are lost...

Mm. There are *meant* to be paths, somewhere in the forest. Really old ones, from before there was even a forest here.

Don't know how we'd find one, mind you.

WE'RE HEADING TOWARDS THE ***SEA***, AREN'T WE?

Yes.

THEN SHOULDN'T WE BE LOOKING FOR ***STREAMS*** AND ***RIVERS***? THEY'LL BE FLOWING ***INTO*** THE SEA, AFTER ALL.

So we follow a stream...?

That's really smart.

DO YOU ... DO YOU THINK PRINADO'S ALL RIGHT?

no.

PRINADO?

WILKINSON? LUZ?

WAKE UP!

PRINADO'S BACK. I THINK.

Prinado? Prinado old buddy?

Is that you?

No... it's not.

WHO--WHO ARE YOU?

DO YOU SERVE THE CUCKOO?

Hhhhh... We are Tweeners...

We do not serve the Cuckoo.

We serve no-one but ourselves. The Tweeners belong to the Tweeners, and these are our woods.

We were here before the Cuckoo. We were here before you.

Tweeners?

Run! Just run!

Cannot escape tweeners.

These are tweener woods.

Yhhh

OW!

THE PORPENTINE! LOOK AT IT!

WHY'VE THEY STOPPED COMING?

The path.

It's one of Murphy's paths. I thought they were all lost...

...but the Porpentine remembers.

As long as we follow the light of the Porpentine we'll be safe.

BUT THE TWEENERS?

They cannot walk on this path.

IN SADNESS AND FEAR WE WALKED DOWN THE RUINED PATH, GUIDED BY THE LIGHT OF THE PORPENTINE.

THERE WAS NO MORE SLEEP THAT NIGHT FOR ANY OF US.

AS THE SUN CAME UP THE LIGHT OF THE PORPENTINE FADED. BUT THE PATH WAS STILL THERE--OLD AND BROKEN, BUT ALWAYS VISIBLE: JUST.

THE STONES OF THE PATH WERE OLD. REALLY OLD.

"FOLLOW THE YELLOW BRICK ROAD" KEPT RUNNING THROUGH MY HEAD. BUT THE STONES WERE NOT BRICKS, AND THEY WERE DIRTY GREY.

SOON WE COULD HEAR THE CRIES OF DISTANT SEAGULLS. THERE WAS SALT IN THE AIR, AND THE LOW MUTED CRASH OF BREAKERS.

AND THEN THE FOREST ENDED, AND SO DID THE PATH.

SO THAT'S THE CITY. AND THAT'S THE SEA. WELL, WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

We've got to get you through the town, and down to the Isle of Thorns.

I'll go down and fetch help.

Luz, girl, it's too dangerous.

No, Wilkinson. You must stay here. Guard the Princess.

I will seek out the resistance. They can hide her for as long as is needed.

ARE YOU SURE, LUZ?

I am sure. *Alone*, I have a chance. Together we have *none*.

You stay here. I will be back by nightfall.

GOOD LUCK, LUZ. HURRY BACK.

I will, Princess. Do not worry. I will be fine.

NEW YORK.

SO UH DON'T YOU WANT TO TALK TO ME? I KNOW UH LOTS OF THINGS. WHEN YOU'RE UH DEAD THERE'S STUFF THEY DON'T BOTHER KEEPING SECRET ANY MORE.

THAT SO?

OKAY, GEORGE, WHY'D THEY LEAVE ME BEHIND TO LOOK AFTER BARBIE?

THAT'S UH PRETTY EASY. IT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE A MAN. THAT STUFF THEY DID WITH THE UH MOON. THAT WAS A WOMEN THING.

I AM NOT A MAN.

MAYBE NOT TO YOU, YOU'RE NOT. BUT YOU'VE GOT THE UH, YOU KNOW. MALE NASTY THING.

LISTEN: I'VE HAD ELECTROLYSIS. I'M TAKING HORMONES. ALL THAT'S LEFT IS JUST A LITTLE LUMP OF FLESH; BUT ALL THAT DOESN'T MATTER...

INSIDE I'M A WOMAN.

SHE DOESN'T THINK SO.

AND TO BE HONEST UH WELL EVEN IF YOU HAD UH HAD THE OPERATION IT WOULDN'T MAKE MUCH DIFFERENCE TO THE UH MOON. IT'S CHROMOSOMES AS MUCH AS UH ANYTHING.

...IT'S LIKE UH GENDER ISN'T SOMETHING YOU CAN PICK AND CHOOSE AS UH FAR AS GODS ARE CONCERNED.

WELL, THAT'S SOMETHING THE GODS CAN TAKE AND STUFF UP THEIR SACRED RECTA.

I KNOW WHAT I AM.

I'LL UH TELL YOU SOMETHING ELSE. MESSING WITH THE MOON LIKE UH SHE DID. THAT'S DANGEROUS. I MEAN REALLY DANGEROUS.

DRAWING DOWN THE UH MOON. THESSALY WASN'T JUST DOING SOMETHING UH SPIRITUAL. THAT WAS UH PHYSICAL TOO.

I UH HATE TO THINK WHAT SHE DID TO THE UH TIDES. AND THE UH WEATHER.

SHE SHOULDN'T MESS WITH THE UH MOON. THAT'S DANGEROUS.

YOU KNOW YOU SHOULD BE UH WORRIED. I MEAN REALLY WORRIED.

YEAH? YOU DON'T SEEM TOO WORRIED.

WHAT HAVE I GOT TO BE WORRIED ABOUT? I'M DEAD.

WHY ARE YOU TELLING ME THIS?

OH, YOU KNOW. IT'S UH NICE TO HAVE SOMEONE TO UH TALK TO. AND US GUYS SHOULD STICK TOGETHER.

I AM NOT A...

LISTEN, UM GEORGE. HOW COME YOU CAN TALK? I THOUGHT THESSALY TOLD YOU TO STAY QUIET.

THESSALY'S GONE. HER UH COMMANDS ONLY HOLD WHILE SHE'S HERE.

DOES THAT MEAN I COULD LEAVE IF I WANTED TO?

OH.

SURE.

ARE YOU UH GOING TO? UH GO AWAY?

I CAN'T LEAVE HER. SHE'S MY ONLY FRIEND. SHE DOESN'T TREAT ME LIKE A FREAK, OR A WEIRDZO, OR ANYTHING. JUST A FRIEND.

I'VE GOT TO STAY WITH HER, EVEN IF I DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS STUFF, AND THE BITS I DO UNDERSTAND SCARE ME SHITLESS.

THESSALY AND THE GUYS. ARE THEY THERE WITH HER? IN HER DREAM?

I UH DON'T THINK SO. NOT YET. THEY'RE STILL WALKING THE MOON'S ROAD.

BUT YOU SHOULDN'T WORRY ABOUT THEM...

...YOU SHOULD WORRY ABOUT BARBIE.

AND THE WEATHER.

I'M HUNGRY, WILKINSON.

Don't you worry, Princess. When Luz comes back she'll bring food. and friends.

Just you keep smilin'.

PRINADO'S DEAD. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO SMILE ABOUT.

Well, that everything's gone right. I mean, what happened to Prinado was horrible. But we still found the path, and got out of the woods.

The Black Guard missed us in the snow, didn't they?

That's more than luck. Someone's looking out for us. I daresay when we get to the island something'll tell us how to use the Porpentine.

There'll be some mad old hermit. Or instructions carved on a rock, only visible on the day we get there.

It's all working out.

SHH! SOMEONE'S COMING!

Princess Barbara? Wilkinson? Are you there?

Course we're here, you great 'nana.

Well? How'd it go? Did you make contact with the resistance? Did you bring back any friends?

Yes.

Lots of them.

That's her.

Run, Princess! Get away from here!

LUZ?

If you want her, you'll have to take me first!

For Murphy's sake, lass, get back into the *forest*.

RUN!

That's it. Manacle her arms. No need to bind her legs. Not yet.

But I want one of you on each side of her on the walk down.

She is not going to throw herself off the cliffs.

LUZ?

Yes.

WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?

To the Citadel of the Cuckoo.

ARE--ARE YOU THE CUCKOO?

No. But I have the honor to serve her, with all my heart, and all my soul.

THE IRON MANACLES CUT INTO MY WRISTS.

IN THE TOWN BLANK-EYED PEOPLE STARED AT US, HOPELESSLY. THEY LOOKED LIKE COWS ON THEIR WAY TO THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE...

...BUT PERHAPS THAT WAS HOW THEY SAW ME.

BUT...

...THIS ISN'T A CITADEL. I KNOW THIS PLACE. THIS WAS OUR OLD HOUSE IN FLORIDA.

THIS WAS WHERE I GREW UP.

Go in, Barbie.

She's waiting for you.

AND THEN THEY TOOK OFF THE MANACLES.

AND I WENT IN.

End of Chapter Four.

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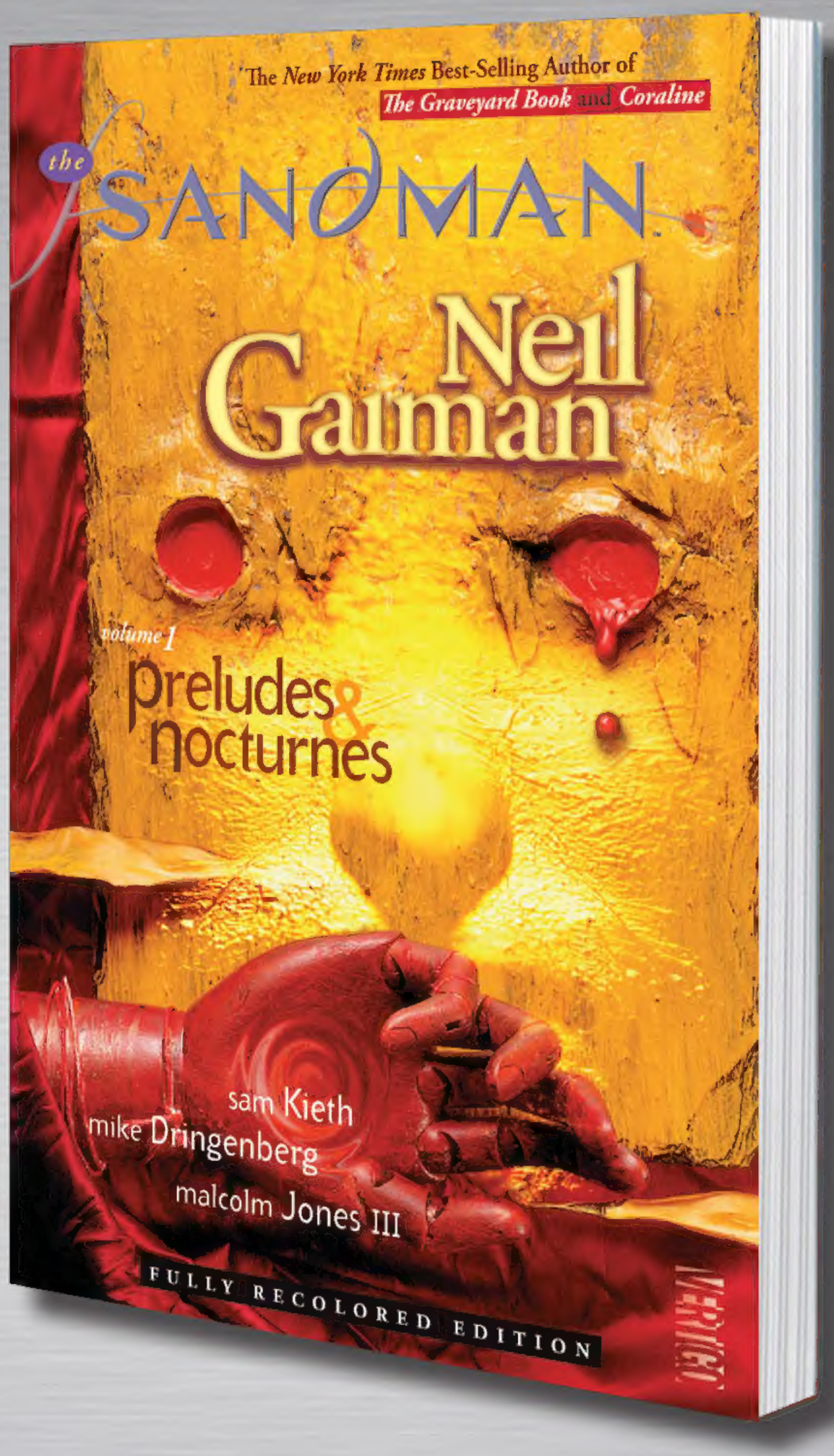

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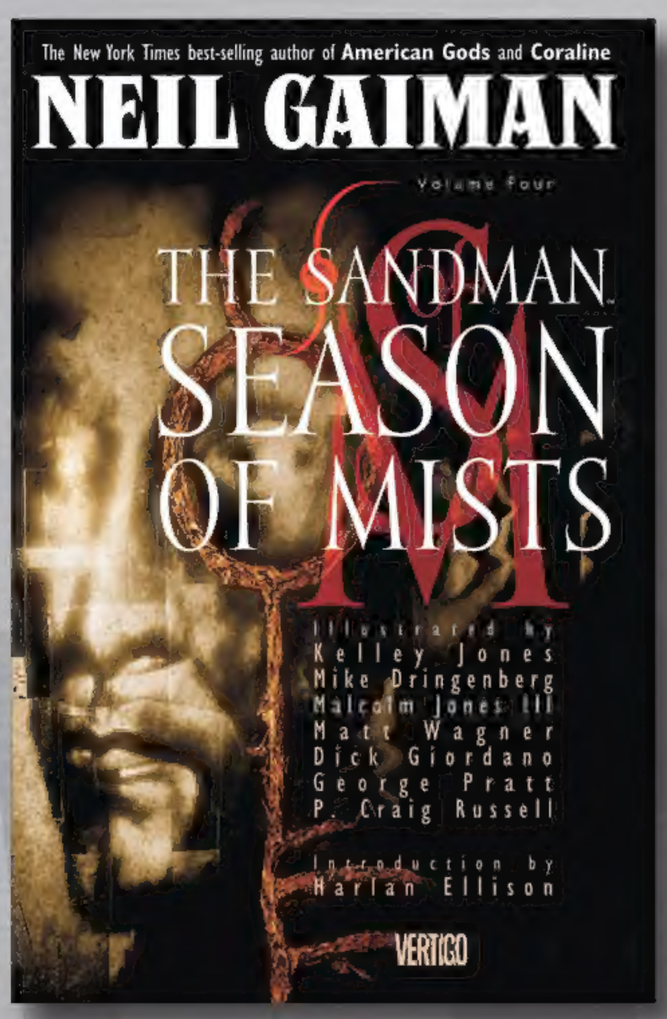

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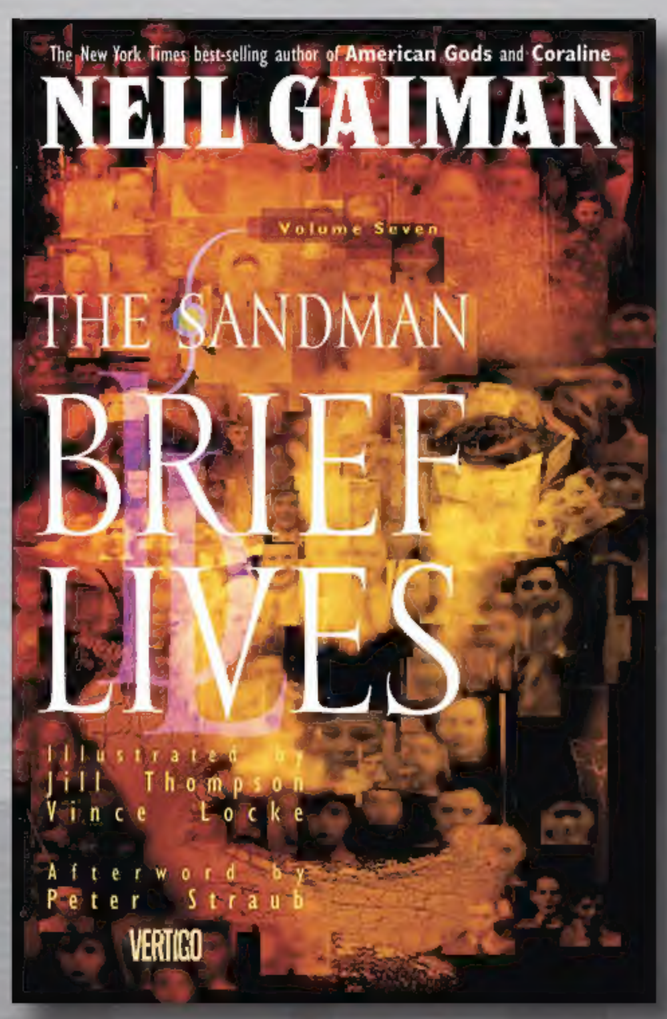

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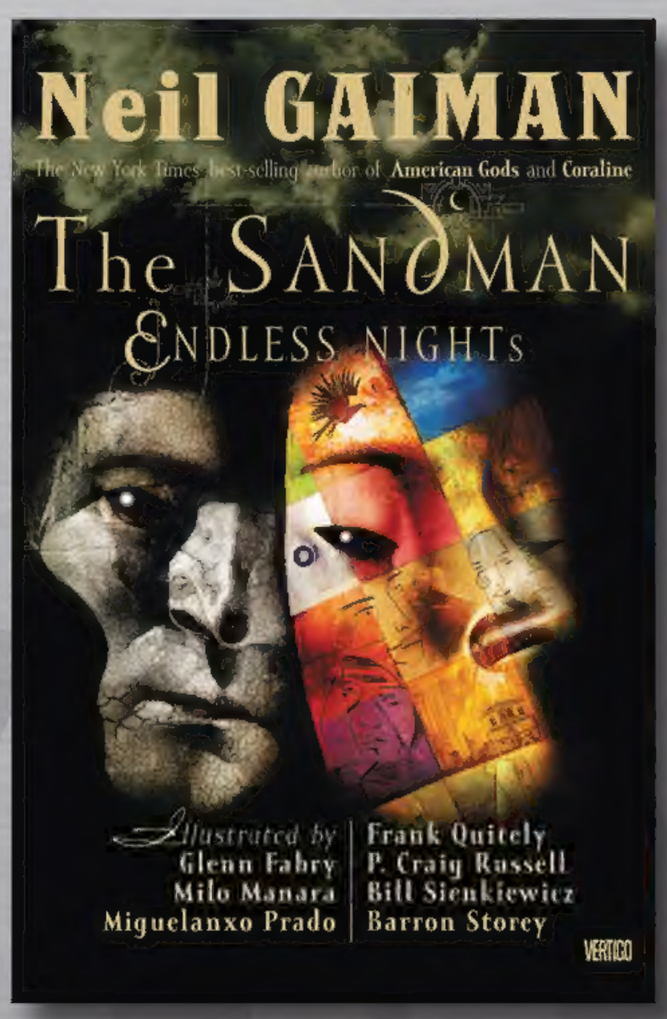

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